

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD

MONDAY, JULY 31, 2006

3:00 P.M., J. MARTIN GRIESEL ROOM, CENTENNIAL PLAZA II

The Historic Conservation Board met at 3:15 P.M., in the J. Martin Griesel Room, Centennial Plaza II, with members Senhauser, Spraul-Schmidt, Sullebarger, Chatterjee, Raser and Wallace present. Absent: Bloomfield and Kreider.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 2959 WOLD AVENUE, EAST WALNUT HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Adrienne Cowden presented a report on proposed construction of a new attached garage at 2959 Wold Avenue, East Walnut Hills Historic District. The garage would be added to the rear of the site and constructed of material similar to those of the house. Mr. Cowden said staff believes that the addition is compatible with the original structure, but proposed changing the window openings. She suggested that six-over-one windows with rectangular upper sash would be more consistent with the half-timber walls than the arched units proposed. Project architect Tom Wilcox agreed to make this change.

Ms. Cowden stated that staff felt that an arched window would be more appropriate in a masonry wall and had suggested that the first story be clad in stone to match that of the house. Mr. Wilcox indicated he had investigated engineered stone and cultured stone for the building, but the treatment was ultimately cost prohibitive.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Raser, second by Spraul-Schmidt) to take the following actions:

Find that the proposed new garage meets the East Walnut Hills Historic District guidelines and approve a Certificate of Appropriateness with the following conditions

1. The pair of window openings on the west elevation shall have a flat lintel with six-over-one sash to match the house.
2. Final construction drawings shall be submitted to the Urban Conservator for review and approval prior to construction.
3. The Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work shall be valid for a two-year period only starting from July 31, 2006.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS & ZONING VARIANCES, 2300 ASLAND AVENUE, UPLANDS HISTORIC DISTRICT

William Forwood, Urban Conservator, presented a report on a proposal to construct an elevator addition to 2300 Ashland Avenue in the Uplands Historic District. This was required to make the upper floor rooms accessible its wheelchair-bound tenant. The elevator enclosure will be on the Cypress Street side of this corner property with a first floor of brick and a second of aluminum siding. View of the new addition would be obscured in part by an existing 7' high brick wall that runs the length of the side yard. In response to Mr. Raser, Mr. Forwood confirmed that the first floor strip windows will be infilled to match the surrounding brick wall.

Mr. Forwood said that staff had discussed with the applicant alternate locations for the addition, but there was insufficient clearance on the opposite side or between the rear wings. Likewise, the addition could not be adjusted on the Cypress elevation to preserve the first floor strip windows. The applicant and contractor David McCollum said that he had considered locating the elevator

within the house, but there was insufficient space to accommodate the full-size elevator required to accommodate a large motorized wheelchair and respirator.

The Zoning Code requires a side yard setback of 10 feet. The addition will extend within 7.75' of the streetside property line, so will need a variance for 2.25'.

Ms. Wallace suggested that the addition might be further screened from street view by a tree. Mr. McCollum answered that to the area between the elevator shaft and the existing brick wall is too narrow for a new tree. Similarly, the small area between the wall and sidewalk would not be suitable for a tree.

Ms. Sullebarger suggested the roof of the elevator shaft be hipped to match the house. Mr. McCollum stated that would be acceptable.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second by Raser) to take the following actions:

1. Find that the location of the proposed elevator addition though unfortunate in its orientation to Cypress Street is dictated by the conditions of the site and that there is no feasible and prudent alternative to providing wheelchair access through the building.
2. Grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the elevator addition as proposed on the condition that the roof be changed to a hipped.
3. Grant a zoning variance to allow the elevator addition to be constructed 7.75' from the side property line on Cypress Street (a reduction of 2.25') finding that such relief from the literal implication of the Cincinnati Zoning Code will not be materially detrimental to the public health, safety, and welfare or injurious to property in the district or vicinity where the property is located and is necessary and appropriate in the interest of historic conservation so as not to adversely affect the historic architectural or aesthetic integrity of the district.
4. Authorize the Urban Conservator to approve the final building plans for conformance to that approved by the Board.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, DD REVIEW & ZONING VARIANCES, NEW K-12 SCHOOL FOR THE CREATIVE & PERFORMING ARTS (SCPA), OVER-THE-RHINE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Adrienne Cowden presented a report on the proposed new K-12 School for the Creative & Performing Arts (SCPA) in the Over-the-Rhine Historic District. The applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness and the necessary Zoning Variances to build a new K-12 facility on the block bounded by W. 12th Street, Central Parkway, Race Street and Elm Street. The project site is located within Sub-District "C" in the Downtown Development (DD) District. The new school will replace the existing SCPA facility located at 1310 Sycamore Street.

The Board reviewed earlier proposals for this project on a site south of Music Hall in 1998 and 2002. In August 2005, the Board considered preliminary drawings for the school on its current, Central Parkway site. Since that time, the applicant has revised the design to retain two building on the northwest corner of the site at 12th and Elm Streets (1122-1126 Elm Street and 129 W. 12th Street). Although it is assumed that CPS will eventually acquire these properties from the Drop Inn Center, the schedule demands that the architects design around the buildings at this time. The longer-term intent is to demolish the buildings and landscape the area, as shown in the present renderings of this façade. The project still requires the demolition of three buildings – 1121 Race Street, 1127 Race Street and 1129-1131 Race Street – at the northeast corner of the

site. The applicant has supplied conceptual drawings, floor plans and elevations for the proposed school. The design is three stories tall with a formal entrance on Central Parkway.

A pre-hearing meeting was held on July 26, 2006 with representatives of CPS, the architects Cole+Russell, and Jorge Perez representing the YMCA present. Marge Hammelrath and Ken Jones also reviewed the plans. Ms. Hammelrath did not express a formal opinion on the design. Mr. Jones reiterated many of the concerns he expressed at the August 2005 Board meeting.

The Over-the-Rhine Historic District Conservation Guidelines permit infill on vacant sites especially to infill gaps in the streetscape. The guidelines state that new construction should be well designed but should not replicate existing buildings. It should reflect the overall character of the historic district in composition, materials, openings, rhythm, scale, proportion, and height. The proposed school generally complies with the intent of the district guidelines; however, the specific recommendations are more appropriate to smaller-scale infill buildings than monumental structures such as SCPA.

Under the conservation guidelines, the Board may approve the demolition of existing contributing structures if a non-profit can demonstrate the properties cannot be used in a manner that is compatible with its organizational purposes. The buildings could theoretically be rehabilitated for use by the school, but this option would not meet the facility's programmatic needs. The buildings on Race Street also occupy an area needed as a staging area during construction and thereafter a critical site for teacher, visitor and handicapped parking.

Ms. Cowden briefly outlined the Zoning Variances required by the project for building setbacks, the number of loading spaces, accessory and off-site parking, and signage. Ms. Cowden stated that staff believes that utilizing existing nearby parking structures and surface lots is appropriate and that minimizing the amount of on-site parking is in the interest of the school and the surrounding neighborhood.

Mr. Raser stated that generally when the Board grants a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of a contributing building, it is with the condition that the owner has submitted a permit application for a replacement building. In this case (referencing the letter from CPS Superintendent Rosa Blackwell), Mr. Raser stated it appears that an exception to that policy would have to be made to accommodate the applicant's construction schedule. Mr. Raser said that he is concerned about making an exception to the demolition guidelines for a public entity that it might not extend to a private developer.

Ms. Cowden responded that it was her understanding that until the buildings are demolished, the engineers cannot complete the site survey necessary to prepare the final construction documents. CPS would lose a substantial amount of money if the project is delayed, but it would be up to the Board to decide if Superintendent Blackwell's letter was sufficient. In answer to Ms. Spraul-Schmidt, Ms. Cowden stated the SCPA building would be funded by a combination of public and private sources.

In response to Mr. Raser, Ms. Cowden said that L.E.D. marquee sign on the theater's Central Parkway lobby wall will run continuous text announcing upcoming events. Flashing signs that change intensity, color and pattern of illumination at less than ten-second intervals are not permitted. Staff would not typically support the installation of a flashing sign in any historic district; however, staff believes that the proposed sign is appropriate for a modern theater and performing arts school.

In response to Mr. Senhauser, Mr. Forwood outlined the provisions of the Zoning Code that require an owner to file for a building permit for a replacement structure and/or to post a bond prior to securing a permit for demolition in the DD District. Basically, this bond ensures the maintenance of the open lot for as long as it remains vacant.

Tom Lindsey of Cole+Russell Architects was present to answer questions from the Board.

Mr. Chatterjee stated that he had concerns about the plan from an urban design standpoint. In an urban park setting, the facades of enclosing buildings are very important. He said he understood why the building faces Central Avenue but remained concerned about its relationship to Washington Park. He said Washington Park was a major asset of Cincinnati and it looked like the school turned its back on the park. Unlike both Music Hall and Memorial Hall, which face the park, the proposed design for the north elevation of SCPA disrupts the continuity of the facades facing Washington Park.

Mr. Lindsey stated that the dominant architectural curve brings primary attention to Central Parkway and draws the eye up Elm Street. This feature gives prominence to the Central Parkway façade, but it was not intended to diminish the Washington Park facade. He said the other three elevations have also evolved in response to requirements for parking, playgrounds and loading. The playground area was placed on the north elevation to relate to the park. The design team determined the north elevation a natural place for the onsite parking. Once CPS acquires the buildings on the northwest corner of the site, it can develop a more significant plaza, better related to the park.

Ms. Spraul-Schmidt said she has the same concern as Mr. Chatterjee regarding the north façade and the overall site plan as it relates to Washington Park. She suggested that a good precedent was Music Hall, which has two major front facades. The proposed SCPA does not have that type of rhythm.

Mr. Raser stated that originally there was to be a dramatic relationship between the new SCPA and Music Hall and this has not been accomplished. He stated that in the DD Zoning District the requirement that buildings must be brought up to the property line is to preserve its vital urban character. Mr. Raser said that although the Elm Street façade is brought up to the street, it is bland and needs to respect better the urban corridor. He also questioned CPS's intention to acquire and demolish the buildings on the northwest corner to use that space to display art and sculpture in front of a blank wall. Mr. Lindsey responded that a plaza and artistic display facing the park would be a better situation than the present.

Mr. Raser added that the design team was given suggestions and told that there were design problems with the 12th Street elevation and changes were necessary. Ms. Sullebarger stated that many of the same suggestions and comments given today were given to the design team a year ago. She said the building needs a more unified approach and additional thought to how the building relates to the site. Ms. Wallace concurred that the same questions and concerns were voiced at the Preliminary Design Review in August 2005.

Mr. Senhauser stated that he did not disagree with issues raised by Board members. He added that the Ohio Schools Facility Commission places many restrictions on school design that go beyond urban design issues. He said that he remembered discussing in August 2005, ways to create a significant entrance off Twelfth Street that would be more than a sidewalk and door. Mr. Senhauser said there are opportunities to treat open space in an urban manner that would be both respectful and compatible with the park. He cited Washington Park and Music Hall as an effective and complimentary relationship between an urban park and a monumental building.

David Beurket, 1110 Race Street business owner, stated he supported the proposed Performing Arts School.

David Crafts, of GCAEC, project engineer, stated his job was to get the design moved forward and to build the school. He said that due to state and school board rules, unless the buildings on the northeast corner are demolished and the land is cleared, the project may not move past schematic design.

Ty Provosty, Pendleton Neighborhood Community Council President and a member of the Washington Park Steering sub-committee of 3CDC, stated he was present at the August 2005 Board meeting and felt at that time that the new SCPA building design turned its back on Washington Park. He stated this design is wrong for the City of Cincinnati and does nothing to attract people to the community. He also said the project should be done properly and not be rushed to meet a timeline. He suggested bringing the theater entrance to the north elevation to face the park and move the parking lot to the corner of Race Street and Central Parkway. He urged CPS to step forward and make the SCPA the best it can be for the urban neighborhood.

Ken Jones, Co-president of the Over-the-Rhine Foundation and long-time resident, stated that while half of the project funding from CPS and the Ohio School Facilities Commission is in place, the other half of the funding from GCAEC is not. He said the SCPA should face the park. In addition, Mr. Jones stated that the Board should not allow the demolition of contributing buildings unless the removal will create a better urban fabric. He said he hopes the Board will not approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for this project until the neighborhood concerns have been addressed.

Margo Warminski, of the Cincinnati Preservation Association, stated that her organization does not approve of the inconspicuous entry and parking lot located on the north side of the site. She also said they felt it would set a negative precedent to allow demolition of the contributing buildings prior to all funding being in place.

Mr. Lindsey stated that the design development plans are fifty percent complete and are expected to be completed by late August 2006. He said under a very aggressive schedule, construction drawings are to be completed in January 2007 and site work begun in February or March 2007. He also said this project has been in process for five years and many people are anxious for it to move forward. He added that he would welcome the opportunity to return to the Historic Conservation Board and make a formal presentation of the plan.

Mr. Senhauser suggested acting on the first two staff recommendations dealing with the demolition of 1127 Race Street (non-contributing building) and 1121 and 1129-1131 Race Street (two contributing buildings). He suggested that the issues of zoning variances and the approval of the building design be tabled for further consideration and that a sub-committee of the Board be formed to continue discussions with CPS and its architects.

Mr. Crafts stated he is willing to work with the sub-committee and design team to resolve design issues. Ms. Spraul-Schmidt stated this project is very important to the Board as evidenced by the members' willingness to spend additional time in a sub-committee. Mr. Raser reiterated his discomfort with allowing demolition of contributing buildings without a building permit for the SCPA in place.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted (5 aye, 1 nay) (motion by Sullebarger, second by Chatterjee) to take the following actions:

1. Approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of 1127 Race Street finding that this building does not contribute to the Over-the-Rhine Historic District and its demolition will not adversely affect the historic character of the streetscape or district.
2. Table the request for demolition of the two contributing buildings at 1129-1131 Race Street as well as items related to the proposed construction of the SCPA building and required zoning variances.
3. Form a design committee of the Historic Conservation Board to work with the project design team on the outstanding issues.

ADJOURN

As there were no other items for consideration by the Board, the meeting adjourned.

William L. Forwood
Urban Conservator

John C. Senhauser
Chairman

Date: _____